Increased school day: pros and cons

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The three biggest benefits of extending the school day going along with the CPS plan for teachers are increased instructional time, opening up the master schedule enough to have the opportunity for music classes to not conflict with AP or ACT prep classes so student retention rates go up in the arts, and possible increased opportunities for students that want to take more arts, music, or PE classes, as CPS has stated one of the effects would be upon implementation of the program.

Although I believe there is not data out there that can prove increased instructional time alone will increase student achievement, I believe if planned and implemented in an effective way, it can definitely have an impact on students lives. More rehearsal time for my band opens up the opportunity for more refined and polished performances, as well as possibly adding an extra concert or specialty performances into the concert season.

This increased time could also impact scheduling in a way that would keep students in the band program all 4 years of high school, where now my school and many others have to compete with AP and test prep classes that the administration, guidance, and programming administrator will override a student’s choice of classes for what might be best for the school’s annual yearly report or school report card. Administration would declare they are looking out for the students best interests when making these changes put politics and statistical data are too powerful of prospects to not consider, and they are made to believe every student must go to college, which I don’t agree with.

The third reason I have is similar to the second, in that extra time would allow students that might not take music, art, or PE classes to have the opportunity to take these courses, and stay in them. CPS has deemed these “enrichment” classes, which undoubtedly are enriching, but it seems music, art, and PE are not important at all, so why not just make them after school activities. I feel like my content area of education just keeps getting pushed out for classes about how to take a test. I don’t feel its right, but I will take the extra time if given to me and not complain. I hope for the day when some hard data comes out that proves music can be a crucial part of academic success, achievement, and growth, and everyone will actually believe that data. Will that day ever come?

The two biggest problems with the plan are that there are not a lot if any details pertaining to how the program will be implemented besides the general increase of time. How will the extra time increase achievement? The second is the violation of the teacher’s union contractual rights which seem to be constantly trampled upon leading up to contract negotiations for next term. The dire economic atmosphere of the country combined with a PR campaign against teaching as a profession, “bad teachers” are everywhere, this seems to be the perfect storm for union busting and a “make up any policy you want and it will happen” free for all in the beaurocracy. It’s not right to cut teachers contractual pay, mandate in increase in work hours without pay, and use the media, parents, and administers to bash teachers into accepting the deal without any planning, just generalities and assumptions of the merits of such a program.

If I had to vote today, tomorrow, or next week, I would definitely vote NO on it, because of the above statements. If we were paid for the extra time, were included in the planning and implementation of the increased time, and had a solid partnership with CPS in everything involving this policy, I would vote YES. I would love more time with my students, I just feel angry and abused on how it is coming to fruition. Why do lawmakers and beaurocrats create education policy instead of education professionals, and why do they not have an equal partnership with the educators implementing that policy.